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AUNT DOROTHY

AN OLD VIRGINIA
PLANTATION STORY

MARGARET J. PRESTON

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AUNT DOROTHY





MISTRESS DOROTHY CLAYBORNE.

AUNT DOROTHY

AN

Old Virginia Plantation-Story

BY

MARGARET J. PRESTON

AUTHOR OF OLD SONG AND NEW, CARTOONS, FOR LOVE'S SAKE,
MONOGRAPHS, COLONIAL BALLADS, ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

By G. F-R.

NEW YORK

ANSON D. F. RANDOLPH AND CO.

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AUNT DOROTHY.

I.

“ WOT yo’ ’pinion now, Marse Doctah?
Ar’ ole Mis’ gwine die?”

“ She’s mighty ill, Uncle Reuben, and I advise all you good people on the plantation to get together and pray for her to-night.”

“ Dat we will, sah, foh she’s ben a mon’-sus good mistis ter all we-uns. I dunno wot ’ll come ob de ole plantashun ef Mistis be took ’way. Yo’ knows she’s ben managin’ heah ebber sence ole Marse’ deff, an’ dat leas’ dozen yeah back; foh I mines dat Chinquapin Joe warn’t bo’n tell some time ’fore de nex’ chinquapin seas’n, an’ Chinquapin Joe, he be mos’ ’lebben. Hit war bad ’nuff wen ole Marse went, an’ lef’

dis gre't big plantashun 'dout a head. But um! Marse Doctah, we knowed ole Mis' 'ud manage mighty well; foh we allers 'lowed ('hine backs, yo' knows) dat ef she did n't pint'ly manage de plantashun, she manage ole Marse, an' dat 'bout de same ting. But hit 'll clean upset we-alls, ef she go; foh young Marse Lucien, he ben 'way so much, an' jes lub books onnyhow, an' no 'count foh managin' de people; leas'-wise, his ma, she nebber let him try."

"Well, Uncle Reuben," said Dr. Brune, gathering up his horse's rein, "you must all get together to-night, and see what prayer can effect; for I 've done all I can, and it will just be as God wills. You believe in prayer, Uncle Reuben?"

"B'lieve in pra'r, sah? I doos—in peace. Yo' mines dat time Shad dun got drown? Ef we ain' pray dat night, 'Postle Poll hisse'f nebber dun hit. An' yo' knows yo' dun brung him ter life jes de minute pra'r-meetin' war ober!"

"Maybe Aunt Zinkie's rubbing and hot

blankets had something to do with that; but anyhow, it won't hurt you folks to try what prayer can do."

The doctor cantered down the broad avenue, and Uncle Reuben walked off sadly in the direction of the quarters.

The showery April evening was closing in, and through the rifts of broken cloud, long rays of light were slanting over the lawn at Hazlecroft. The tender green of early spring was on the grass; and the old broad-girthed oaks — relics of the primeval forest — were soft with freshening foliage. The hazel hedges that bordered the wide grounds were gay with catkins and shining leaves that twinkled in the watery light, and the dogwood and Judas-tree mingled their white and purple blooms together in a great clump near the carriage gate.

But Uncle Reuben saw none of the beauty of the evening, and concerned himself little about the rich opening of the season. His mind was filled with the dig-

nity and solemnity of his position at the present moment ; for he held the office of preacher among the " people " of the plantation, and he duly felt the responsibility of the obligation which Dr. Brune had just suggested as resting upon him.

Mistress Dorothy Clayborne, the owner of the broad plantation of Hazlecroft, the energetic, high-spirited, and strong-tempered manager of the hundred black people whose destinies Providence had put into her guiding hand, — the Lady Bountiful of the whole region, and the liberal-minded supporter of the church and all good charities in her neighborhood, — lay apparently on her death-bed. Dr. Brune had said that his skill could avail nothing more, and Uncle Reuben felt the grave importance of the duty, which the doctor seemed to have imposed upon him, namely, that of getting the people together and offering up special petitions for her life.

" Mammy," he said, as he joined his wife, who had been watching his colloquy

with the doctor from her cabin door, "cl'ar up, an' hab suppah ober in no time. Dr. Brune, he say ole Mis' mighty low. He 'low physic jes dun all hit ken; an' he say de bestes' ting we-uns ken do now ar' ter pray; so yo' heah; gib de chillen dey suppah stre't off. Meck Shad an' Mess an' Chinquapin Joe brung cheers from Aunt Viney's an' de folks 'roun', while I's gwine gib notice dat dar'll be 'spress pra'r heah at sebben 'clock, ter 'treat de Lord foh ole Mis' life; foh I tells yo', accordin', ole 'ooman, times gwine panted hard wid we, ef ole Mis' be took."

Aunt Zinkie lifted her hands in deprecation at the idea; for although Mrs. Clayborne was a somewhat rigid mistress, and held her servants well up to their duty, she was such a kind one that they well knew she had their interests as much at heart as her own. Aunt Zinkie was often heard to say, "When we boddors ole Mis' tur'bly, ole Mis', she say she hate we-uns, an' wish we-uns 'ud run off. Ole Mis' ain'

hate we-uns 'tall. Ain' she set up harf de night wid some leetle pickaninny wot got de croup, 'kase she feared he mammy 'glect ter gib him de physic right? Nun-no! ole Mis', she ain' hate we-uns 'tall."

With all her gift for management and discipline, Mrs. Clayborne's nature had its comical side. She had a genius for laughter, and that of the most contagious kind. Often when administering a reproof she would turn aside to some bystander with her face all crumpled up, and her short, stout little figure shaking all over, from her easily aroused risibility, so that the silent shaking of the suppressed laughter generally proved a salve to the sharp word or the tickle of the little ivory whip.

"De lamps all lit up at de big house," cried Chinquapin Joe ; "time foh de pray-in' ter begin. Mammy, all de folks be comin'?" And the boy hopped briskly over the rows of split-bottom chairs arranged for them in Aunt Zinkie's cabin.

“Yo’ teck dat,” said Aunt Zinkie, giving Chinquapin Joe the weight of her heavy hand on the side of his head, and jerking him off the chair, — “yo’ teck dat, an’ creep in de corner yander, an’ kep yo’self quiet, or I’ll hab de wool off yo’ head.”

Chinquapin Joe beckoned to his brothers: “Shad, Mess, an’ Bedego, we’s gwine pray; come in an’ git yo’selves fix, ’fo’ mammy skin ebbery niggah ob yo’ cl’arter de bone!”

The three shiny-faced young imps forthwith sprang in, jumping over the chairs, and each getting a clip from Aunt Zinkie as he passed on to the corner, where they ensconced themselves.

The dark faces of the “field hands” looked long and solemn as they gathered round Uncle Reuben and listened to his accounts of the old mistress, who lay dying, as he proceeded to inform them, up at the big house.

“She dun ben a good mistis ter all we,” he said, with a tremor in his voice, as he



"I'S GWINE READ FOH YO' BEN'FIT."

opened a large Testament and fumbled the leaves to hunt something suitable for the occasion, — “she dun ben a good mistis —”

“’Cept wen she tickle we wid de tail ob her white cat,” muttered Chinquapin Joe, loud enough to be heard by all present. Aunt Zinkie gave him a gouge with the toe of her big corn-field shoe, and Uncle Reuben went on:—

“I’s gwine read foh yo’ ben’fit, breaden an’ sisten, suffin’ fittin’ dis ’casion”; and he turned about his well-worn Testament for a considerable time before he hit upon St. John’s account of the marriage feast at Cana. His young master Lucien had taught him to read; but he had been no apt scholar, and his mistakes would have set any other audience to tittering. It did bring out an exclamation from Chinquapin Joe, the most irrepressible of all the young negroes: “Hi, Mess! she wa’n’t no temp’ance lady, war she?” A thump on the head from Aunt Zinkie’s rough hand made

Joe collapse for a time. When the reading was over, "Bruddah Dan'el" was asked "ter lead in pra'r," but the latter excused himself:—

"Bruddah Reuben, I dun ben hollerin' at de oxes all day; dey's so contrary dat I's hoa'se as one ob de ma'sh frogs. Yo' jes hitch up yo'se'f."

This was the invitation Uncle Reuben wanted; for, being a conceited soul, he was entirely of the opinion that he was the only "culled pusson on de plantashun wot possessed de gif ob pra'r." His petitions at least had the quality of sincerity and earnestness, for he was devotedly attached to his mistress, and looked upon her as his best earthly friend.

"O good Lord," he pleaded, "we po' sinnahs comes ter put up pra'r foh ole Mistis' life. Hit ar' jes de reason we meets at dis onusual hour, 'kase de doctah, he say she mighty low. We needs ole Mistis heah, good Lord, more'n dey needs her up in hebben. Dar's plenty ob angels

up dar, an' dey would n' miss her gre'tly from de quire, 'kase she ain' no v'ice ter sing, nohow. She offen 'low she nebber could tu'n a chune, eben wen she hab pra'rs wid we up at de big house. ["Dat 's so, dat 's so, good Lord!"] We knows de Lord allers wants ter meck His chillens happy, an' ole Mistis, she nebber could be happy 'less she be managin'; an' dar'd be no managin' foh her in hebben, 'kase so many dar hab 'sperience, — I means de ole angels, Lord, who ben roun' de t'rone so long, an' hab larnt all de hebbenly ways. But ole Mistis, she be like a young han', an' not much 'count dar. De Lord, He know dat our young marstah he ain' ussen ter manage de people; he dunno 'bout de rations an' all de 'fairs ob sech big plantashun as dis; and t'ings 'ud git mighty onruly. ["Dat 's de truf, good Lord!"] An' Miss Sibylla, whar be de house-keepah, she jes drive all de folks 'mad, 'kase she on'y po' white trash, an' ain' on'erstan' de ways ob 'spectable people

like we is. ["No mo' she ain', O Lord!"] An' de oberseer, Marse Rumble, it teck all Mistis strong han' ter kep him stre't; an' ef she be took, de plantashun 'ud soon be gwine ter de dogs. So spar' ole Mistis, good Lord!" ["Spar' her, spar' her, good Lord!"]

The prayer went on for a considerably longer time, in much the same fashion, Uncle Reuben waxing more earnest with each petition; and the perspiration rolled from his black forehead, as he caught his breath in negro fashion, till he was well-nigh choked. Chinquapin Joe began to think there had been enough of it, and "dat de Lord war mighty hard ter move ef He ain' pay 'tention ter all dat groanin'"; so he persuaded Mess and Bedego to follow him with an "Amen," which was instantly taken up by the whole audience, who held on to it so tenaciously that Uncle Reuben accepted it as a signal for the close of the service.

As soon as the people had dispersed,

Zinkie set upon her husband rather sharply.

“Lor’ a massy! daddy, wot yo’ be so



AUNT ZINKIE.

onconsiderin’ as ter read ’bout a weddin’ wen we’s got a fun’ral on han’?”

“Now, ole ’ooman, yo’s got no sense ’bout t’ings ’tall. Cyarn’t yo’ see wich way de rabbit jump? Now, ’cordin’ ter

me mine, dat lady, eben ef she war de mudder ob de Lord Jesus, war mighty like ole Mis'. She war a managin' sort o' pusson ; foh ain' you see she war gwine 'bout, lookin' inter ebberyting? an' wen she fine dey hab no wine, she meck a fuss 'bout hit, jes like ole Mis'. Yo's punkin-headed, Zinkie, ef yo' ain' see de p'int ob dissemblance !”

But Zinkie stuck to it that she did n't think it was the proper thing to read, and Uncle Reuben, repeating his charge of “punkin-headedness,” took his way up to the big house, to make a last inquiry about the sick mistress before he should go to bed.

II.

“**C**OUSIN LUCIEN,” said Annis Fontaine, as she entered the library, after having answered the inquiries of Uncle Reuben, — “Cousin Lucien,” (and her voice grew almost too tremulous for audible speech,) “Aunt Dorothy bids me tell you that she wants to speak with you.”

“How does she seem now, Annis?” asked the young man, anxiously, as he laid down the book he had been reading.

“Very faint and low,” and Annis’s words ended in a sob; but, quickly controlling herself, she went on to say, “She thinks she has not more than sufficient strength for some parting directions which she wishes to leave with you.”

Lucien Clayborne started up with a most distressed look upon his face, and

took his way instantly to his mother's sick-chamber. A bright fire burned upon the broad old-fashioned hearth, though it was mid-April, and crouching around it were two or three of the oldest house servants, with that look of ashy despair upon their faces which the negro countenance is apt to assume when grief or apprehension overshadows it. Lucien found the old maid-servant, who had attended his mother ever since her childhood, vigorously fanning her, and, coming quietly behind her, withdrew the turkey-tail fan from her hand.

"You will chill your mistress, Aunt Anneky," he whispered.

"But she cyarn't git her bref, Marse Lucien; her new-mony's very bad."

"Did the doctor say that fanning was good for pneumonia?"

The whispered conversation roused the sick woman, and, stretching out her hand faintly to her son, she asked, "You there, Lucien? Bid Anneky leave us alone for

a little ; I want to speak with you while I have strength to do so."

The servants withdrew, and with no small difficulty Mrs. Clayborne began to speak, at first in scarcely an audible whisper.

"My dear boy, you see how ill I am. Dr. Brune has not concealed the truth from me ; he says pneumonia is apt to go very hard with a person of my years. It was a great mistake to remain in the dairy so long that damp day. But if it is God's will to call me away, I trust I am content to go."

"Oh, mother," broke in Lucien, kissing the crimson spot on her wasted cheek, and pressing her thin hand between both his own, "don't talk about going away ; I cannot bear it ! You have so much vitality about you, so much will, and God is so good, I cannot think you are going to be taken from us."

"I have no desire to go, my son ; but I can submit if it is the Master's bidding.

You all need me so much here that I feel it hard to drop the reins from my hands."

"But, my darling mother," said Lucien, his self-restrained and reticent nature stirred to unwonted emotion by his mother's words, "we cannot give you up."

"Yes, you can, my dear. It is not in the nature of a Clayborne to make any resistance to the inevitable. And now," she continued, after a pause for breath, "while I have strength to speak, let me give you my commands about the plantation and the various things which I wish to speak of before I go. It will be hard for you, who have been at school and college all your life, to take up the burden of management; but I know you will do your best." And she tenderly laid her hand on the head that was bowed beside her on the pillow.

"Assuredly I will; but do not trouble yourself, mother dear, about things like these. You will exhaust the little strength

which might otherwise avail for your recovery."

"But I could not rest quietly in my grave, Lucien, if I did not do something toward helping you to manage after I am gone. I grieve to think how it will worry you to take up all the details of the plantation, for which you have so little natural taste. Therefore it is that I give you my counsel. I think it would be better for you to dismiss Rumble. He has been overseer here so long that he has become rather masterful; and knowing him as I do, I feel that he might take advantage of your youth and inexperience. A kinder-natured man, too, will deal better with the servants. And Miss Sibylla, my dear, is not quite the housekeeper that can get along here without my hand to direct her. She is not popular with the house servants, and that don't do. Keep Uncle Sharon in the dining-room, and don't let him give up trying to make a good under-waiter of Chinquapin Joe. There is a

great deal of outcome in that boy if he is only rightly managed." But so much effort at speech had exhausted Mrs. Clayborne, and the laboring breath came painfully; this alarmed her son, and he summoned Aunt Anneky.

"Jes like ole Mistis! She gwine man-age on till she die," exclaimed the old servant, in an undertone, as she bathed her mistress's forehead, and held some eau-de-Cologne to her nostrils. "Marse Lucien," she whispered, turning her head to speak to her young master, "foh de Lord o' goodness, keep yo' ma from bod-derin' her life out, 'rangin' foh her own fun'ral; dar'll be people 'nuff ter do de managin' w'en she be took."

It was not long, however, before Mrs. Clayborne revived, and signified her ability to continue the conversation. So, dismissing the maid with a wave of her hand, she began to speak again: —

"I think, dear, you'd better have the branch bottoms well cleared up as soon

as the corn crop, is off the ground. The branch was so swollen by the spring freshet that a great deal of trash was left on them. Your blessed father was so fond of those branch bottoms, and for his sake I have always tried to keep them in very perfect order. I am sure, too, that it will be better for you to lessen your number of horses. They are so much more expensive than mules, and my experience is that I have been keeping too many."

"Mother! mother!" broke in Lucien, "I beseech you not to worry yourself with these details about the plantation. I can never manage as you have done, but I promise you that I will do my best, whenever the direction of affairs does fall into my hands."

"I know it, my son, I know it; but your mother wants to help you, even after she is gone. Hazlecroft has been a fine, well regulated plantation from the time Lord Culpepper passed it over into the hands of the first American Clayborne,

and it must not lose its high character under your management."

"It shall not, if life and health are spared me."

For a little while Mrs. Clayborne lay silent and passive, then, opening her eyes, she fixed them with great earnestness upon the face stooping over her.

"There is another matter, my son, of still graver moment, about which I wish to say a few words. I waited patiently during the past year, hoping to see that my desires might be realized. But you do not readily commit yourself; it is not your way; so that I am altogether in doubt. For the year and a half during which my cousin's orphan child has been a member of our household, I have learned to love her sweet ways and bright presence, — tender, loving young thing that she is, — so that now she has come almost to take the place of your dear sister Dora, lost so many years ago."

The weary eyes closed for a few mo-

ments, and a tear trickled down the pale cheek. "Yes," she whispered, musingly, as if to herself, "Dora would have been almost her age had she lived." Then rousing herself somewhat, and turning to Lucien, she said: "She has been a daughter to me in her tender ministrations. My wish has long been that she should be a daughter indeed."

Lucien gave a sudden start, as if a painful idea had been suggested to him. "Dear mother," he pleaded, "pray do not seek to arrange Cousin Annis's future. She has no special care for me, I am sure. I am only as a cousin or brother to her."

"That is just your unobservant way of looking at things, my son. I've watched Annis many a time when you have been poring abstractedly over those Greek books of yours, and you may depend a woman's wisdom outstrips a man's when she undertakes to investigate such things."

"But, mother —"

“Ah, don’t oppose my wishes in this matter. You have always revered your mother’s opinion, and it would be a bitter thing if this desire of my heart should fail me.”

“Command anything, my precious mother, but don’t ask me to force myself upon one who has no heart to give.”

“No heart to give, Lucien? Why, she is all heart.”

“I don’t mean that, mother.”

“You don’t mean that she has given herself to some one else? You are thinking, perhaps, of that college friend of yours. Believe me, she cares nothing for him. But promise me—”

Here a severe fit of coughing interrupted Mrs. Clayborne, and she fell back among her pillows in a state of exhaustion. Nurses and servants gathered around her, and Lucien was about to send off for Dr. Brune, when gradually the paroxysm passed, and she fell at length into a long, quiet slumber.

It was deep in the night before she wakened. When she did, she turned her eyes about, as if in search of something.

"Does yo' want Marse Lucien?" asked



AUNT ANNEKY.

Aunt Anneky, tenderly. "He 's heah, Mistis; he dun ben settin' at de h'a'th all de night."

"There is one thing I have not mentioned," Mrs. Clayborne made an effort

to say, as Lucien instantly came forward, "and I lay much stress upon it. When I am gone, my son, I want everything to be done to make my death a benefit to all my poor people, to the neighbors, and to our many kindred. Our house is a large one, and you must have them all here. My dear Mr. Holmes must come and read the service and preach my funeral sermon. I wish him to make it as profitable as he can to all the hearers. I've had so much management and so much care during my long widowhood, that I wish him to take as his text, '*Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful.*' Let him impress that upon all my friends,—'*one thing is needful.*' You must be sure and have your uncle Fontaine's family, and your aunt Marshall and her girls, and old Uncle Charles and my brother John and his boys, and the Graveses, and the rest. There'll be room for all. The time of year is favorable too. The mutton and beef are in

fine order, and Gregory has taken good care of the garden —”

Lucien interrupted his mother, tenderly patting her cheek, and saying, “Everything shall be as you wish ; only rest, and trouble yourself about it no more.”

“Marse Lucien,” whispered Aunt Anneky, as the young man stood mournfully looking into the glowing coals,—“Marse Lucien, I ain’ b’lieve Mistis gwine gib up yit ; ’pears ter me as ef she cyarn’t let deff hab de whip-han’ ob her, arter all.”

III.

MRS. CLAYBORNE—or, as all her kindred and the younger members of the families in her neighborhood, in the same rank of life with herself, called her, Aunt Dorothy—was a remarkable woman in her way, and that way it had never happened to her to have crossed. She had been an only child, and the spoiled young mistress of her father's entire great establishment. Her husband, a gentle, indulgent man, had never asserted in any positive way his right to rule, so that, even when she seemed to defer to his authority, she herself had still been the guiding spirit. Submission had no part in the make-up of her character. That she should be obeyed was the accepted rule; and all points which she established she generally carried. Yet there was nothing

exacting or imperious in her manner. There was a certain comicality about the humorous way in which she accomplished her own ends that left all who were obliged to yield to her in a good humor in spite of themselves. Management was her *forte*, and Aunt Anneky used to say: "Ef de Lord want somebody ter manage in dat neighborhood, Mistis 'ud be de han' foh Him!" Nevertheless she had a heart as tender as a child's, and servants and neighbors alike had constant proof of her thoughtful kindness and generosity; and Chinquapin Joe was accustomed to say that "Ef de cat wid de white tail do scratch wid he paw sometime, he dip hit in honey!"

She was a good Christian, and a thorough-going churchwoman; and whenever the number would warrant it, she had old Parson Holmes to come to Hazlecroft and baptize all the babies on the plantation. Christenings were great holidays, for a feast was always prepared for all the

people in the big laundry. She had her own ideas about the naming of the black children; she thought by giving them Scripture names, which she invariably did, holding the right always to name them herself, she might make some impression upon the minds of parents and youngsters alike by charging them to remember that Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and Elijah, and all the host of Bible worthies, were their sponsors; and she did not fail to impress upon some of the older ones that these ancient saints had some way of keeping an eye upon them, though they were up in heaven.

"Joe," she would say, when complaint had been made to her that that young mischief had given a black eye to his brother, "you disgrace your name-saint; the Bible Joseph was merciful to his brothers, even when they behaved like villains to him; and see how you treat Shadrach and Meshach." Then, as she exchanged looks with one of the last-

named boys, the contagious laugh would shake the rotund little figure, taking all the sting out of the rebuke, and give room for the somewhat impertinent rejoinder: "Den wat yo' call me arter him, ole Mis'? At de nex' baptizin' please let de Pa'son christen me ober agin, an' call me G'liah, foh I be ebber so strong!" For which smartness the boy would not fail to get a tickling from the "long-tail white cat," as he had dubbed the little ivory-handled riding-whip which often hung at his mistress's girdle, along with her bunch of keys. He had borne his pseudonym of "Chinquapin" from the time he was three days old, when his brother Shadrach, on being shown the baby, exclaimed, "Hi! mammy, he got chinquapin eyes! Whar yo' dun git chinquapins dis time o' yeah?" and as there were other Joes on the plantation, he was never known by any other than this *sobriquet*.

The mistress thought that the names of the Three Holy Children were exception-

ally proper ones; consequently she had distributed them among Aunt Zinkie's boys. But as they were hard to mouth, and as Shadrach was a slim chap, and Meshach was always getting into what the negroes called a "mess," and Abednego was sleepy-headed, their cognomens resolved themselves into Shad, Mess, and Bedegoes. Finding these three lying on the edge of a cool spring, one day when the overseer had set them to hoeing corn under a hot July sun, their mistress in her rounds gave their bare feet a little tingling with the ubiquitous whip: "You disobedient boys, why are you here instead of in the cornfield?"

"Hit done git so hot, ole Mis', we mos' burn up. 'Sides, we jes' 'bout gwine 'gin ter git ready ter go back!"

"Haven't I told you how the Three Holy Children walked into the fiery furnace when God bid them do it?"

"But, ole Mis'," said Shad, "yo' read 'bout dem at pra'rs, dat dey walk out, d'out

a scotch on dey breeches. He Lord, He mus' a held a numbrel ober *dem*; foh yo' might smell de singe on *we uns* w'en we 's hoein' in de hot sun!" And as the mistress walked away Shad added: "She ain' mad at we; she larf too hard foh dat w'en she tu'n 'way."

IV.

AT an early hour the next day after our story opens, Dr. Brune rode briskly down the avenue from the big house. Aunt Zinkie spied him, and ran from the quarters to intercept him.

“Marse Doctah, wot 'bout Mistis dis mornin'?”

“She had a surprising turn in the night for the better, and from all appearance I am disposed to think the crisis is past.”

“Ef by de crishes yo' means ole Deff, den tank de Lord dat he hab pass by!” and she sped back as eagerly as she had come, to spread the news along the quarters. It was received with genuine joy; for these children of nature always passed from one extreme to another, and they now

fixed it in their minds that the recovery of their mistress was an established fact.

"I nebber b'lieve nuffin' else," said old Uncle Dan'el, scratching his gray wool ; "I nebber knowed de mistis gib up anyt'ing ; she warn't hank'rin' arter de gold'n street, nohow. Aunt Anneky, she tell me she dun heah her talk ter Marse Lucien 'bout de branch bottom, an' de hosses an' mules, an' udder yearthly t'ings. Yo' see she gwine kep de team in han' yit."

Lucien Clayborne, who had been walking up and down the long piazza in earnest talk with Dr. Brune, continued his musing pace after the doctor had left him, and only paused as he saw Annis ascend the steps, with a cluster of fresh white lilacs in her hand. She sprang eagerly forward, dropping her lilacs into her apron, and advancing, with a rush of uncontrollable emotion, seized the hand that was extended to her.

"Oh, Cousin Lucien, God be thanked ! I've just been talking with Dr. Brune, and

he tells me that there is every chance that Aunt Dorothy may recover."

"Yes, God be thanked, Annis," reverently replied the young man, stooping at the same time and touching the fair girl's forehead with his lips.

As she had approached him, the slight girlish figure and buoyant air, wide-open blue eyes and flossy hair, blown back by her rush through the dewy April morning, made him for a moment think of Guido's Aurora, for he had been abroad with his uncle, the professor, the year before, and had been fascinated by the picture in the Rospigliosi Palace at Rome; and when she came close enough for him to see the moisture that overbrimmed her clear eyes, he thought the likeness perfect. The sudden touch of his lips was something so strange, so unusual, that the girl's face was instantly flooded with a bright flush; but before he had time to linger over the thought that flashed through his consciousness, between himself and Annis

seemed to pass the vision of his friend Overton; and Annis broke away to her aunt's chamber, that she might gladden her returning life with the first lilacs of the season.

V.

LUCIEN CLAYBORNE was handsome enough for any girl to fall in love with, with his tall, dignified figure, and his air of very formal yet high-bred courtesy. His reticence and undemonstrativeness were extreme, and it generally set a young and bashful girl—for thirty-five years ago young girls were more shy and bashful than now—into a flutter to have anybody quite so stately address her, even with the chit-chat of ordinary conversation, of which small change, however, Lucien did not carry much about with him, choosing rather (as Addison says) to “give his check for twenty pounds.” As his mother had said, he had been poring over books all his life, and they had perhaps too much absorbed him; at all events, he had found his pleasure too exclusively in them.

It was not surprising, therefore, that no very easy intimacy ever had seemed to grow up between him and Annis. The intercourse of young men and young women in these old days was of a much more formal character than now, and the rigid rules of etiquette were held in great respect by Lucien's fair young cousin. She evidently stood a little in awe of him, and of the scholarship she had often heard attributed to him, and was overmuch impressed with a sense of how easy it would be for him to pose her on any theme,—unless, indeed, he should dare to intrude upon the domain of feminine accomplishments, where she felt her superiority. Whose touch was so delicate upon the piano as hers? Whose warbling outvoiced the mocking-bird's? Whose fingers could sketch so gracefully the pretty bits of woodland scenery about Hazlecroft,—the clump of willows overhanging the meadow spring, the chinquapin bower down at the Wood Pond, the

long drive through the overarching pines, that looked like a cathedral aisle? Who had such a deft hand for imparting touches



HER AUNT'S EASY-CHAIR.

of ornamentation to the somewhat grand old rooms, whose dim furniture needed just such lighting up as she had given it? For Annis never could be for an hour in any apartment without leaving

the evidence of her presence behind her in some little arrangement or touch, that gave an unwonted effect and a different aspect to the whole place. "But," she sometimes mused to herself, "he sees none of this. What are women to him as compared with his books? *They* can't enjoy Theocritus or Æschylus! I doubt if he would have patience even with my beloved Elizabeth Barrett Browning, unless it were with her 'Prometheus Unbound,'—though I must not forget that he *did* bring me a copy of her poems from London last year; yet how wide apart are our tastes!

"‘I know but matters of the house,
And he — he knows a thousand things!’"

It was a soft evening in May, and Annis was feeling very happy from the more rapid recovery of her aunt Dorothy. She had had her aunt's easy-chair wheeled up to the open window, which was trellised over by a wealth of old-fashioned damask roses, whose odor filled the chamber.

Annis threw a cushion down at her aunt's feet (for according to the Virginia habit, she had always called her relative "Aunt Dorothy," though in reality she was only the daughter of her cousin), and taking her seat there, looked up with her great blue eyes full of gladness.

"Dear Aunt Dorothy, it is such a joy to think that you are getting well, and that you will soon be back in your old place again! The house has been so quiet and dull without you! Miss Sibylla has done the best she could during your long illness, and you know I am too young to assume any responsibility as mistress—"

"You are not such a child, my darling. I was twenty-three when my blessed husband married me, and I believe you are not much under that; and he was just Lucien's age, twenty-seven,—a good difference, I think."

Words like these, that conveyed a hint of some deeper meaning, Annis had often heard drop from her aunt's lips during the

year she had been living at Hazlecroft ; and as she caught them now, a deepened color sprang to her cheeks.

“I am glad, my dear,” said Aunt Dorothy, tenderly, as she stooped and kissed her forehead, from which she smoothed back the long loose curls,—“I am glad that you have some understanding of what I have in my mind. I think your heart is telling tales to your cheek. Do you know, there is nothing in this world that would give me such content as to see you installed mistress of Hazlecroft before I go.”

“Oh, Aunt Dorothy, don't talk so ; you are good for twenty years yet !”

“I am not really old, Annis, as years go ; but I grow tired sometimes of all the responsibility that comes upon me. Think of the care of a hundred souls resting on my conscience — not to speak of the care of as many bodies filling my hands ! You all fancy I love management for its own sake ; but it is not so, Annis,—it is not

so. It is the sense of duty that goads me to such restlessness. If you were mistress, you could share all this with me. You have learned what a devoted son Lucien is ; he would make just as devoted — ”

“ Aunt Dorothy,” interrupted Annis, confusedly, smothering her words in her aunt’s lap, “ please don’t say anything more about this ; such a notion never entered Cousin Lucien’s head — ”

“ Or yours ? ”

“ Lor’ a massy ! ” broke in Aunt Anneky, entering the chamber at that moment. “ Mistis, yo’ settin’ at de open windah dis time o’ night ? Why, see, de moon dun riz ober de branch bottom ; yo’ cotch yo’ deff o’ cold ! Miss Annis, I’s s’prised at yo’ — ” But Miss Annis was not there to hear the rest of Aunt Anneky’s objurgation. With a quick step she bounded through the long piazza, and made her way to her favorite garden nook, under a great clump of clematis and May roses, and sat down to cool her flushed

cheeks, and to recover from the flutter which her aunt's words had given her.

The moon was well up above the branch bottom, as Aunt Anneky had said, and it bathed the whole old-fashioned garden in a tide of loveliness that made it seem like the Vale of Cashmere, and this the "Feast of Roses," — not the Jacqueminot and Maréchal Niel and La France of a later day, but the deliciously perfumed damasks and May roses and eglantines and sweet-briers and pure-breathed Ayrshires, all the out-of-fashion tribe that used to make the formal gardens of old Virginia so fragrant in the rose season.

Annis laid her arms across the little garden table, and rested her head upon them. The full moon flooded her with its radiance, and a mocking-bird near began to trill, with a low, delicious warble, his good-night song. The beauty and the quiet, the fragrance and the music, soothed the young girl strangely, and she sat there long, feeling all the perturbation which the

expression of her aunt's wish had aroused drifting away.

"Dear Aunt Dorothy!" she whispered to herself, as she began to think it was time to return to the house. "She thinks she does n't love to manage, and yet she wants to control her son in the one matter which of all others in the world should be left to his absolute freedom. What if she should tell him of her plan! How it would embarrass my life here! Perhaps she *has* told him, and that is the reason he is so curiously reticent toward me. Really Aunt Dorothy's gift for management is not always wisely exercised."

Just then there was a swaying of a rose branch near her, and in a pause of the mocking-bird's twitterings she heard a foot-fall on the gravel. The next moment a hand was lightly laid on her bowed head.

"What's wanting?" asked Annis, quickly looking up. "Is tea ready, or are you afraid I'll take cold out in the



IN THE OLD-FASHIONED GARDEN.

dew, and you have come to bring me a shawl?"

"Neither — neither," said Lucien, a little impatiently. "I saw you fly off to the garden some half-hour ago, and I have made a tour through the three old summer-houses in search of you."

"Ah, Aunt Dorothy wants me. I will go at once."

"No, no; my mother is not needing you, especially as you have been spending all the evening with her. Indeed, I begin to be a little jealous of her entire absorption of you."

Annis opened her great blue eyes wide at the admission; it was so odd for her cousin Lucien to say anything of the kind; for he was a man of few words, as has been said, and in no wise given to compliments.

"Ah!" she began, with a shy archness, "don't try to make me believe that any woman of our modern day could ever win you away from Andromache, Iphigenia,

Medea, and the rest of your Greek dames."

"They are charming enough, to be sure, to read of. As to having such heroines, with their grand tragic air, sitting opposite to one at the tea table, or being one's companion over the evening lamp, that's quite another matter. But since you are talking of Greek women, let me ask you if you recall the line I made you listen to the other night from Euripides, where Admetus pours out his love to Alcestis?"

"I remember that you asked me to observe the music of the words as you read them in the original."

"I remember the translation, if you do not:

'If thou art lost to me, life's joy is gone.'

Annis,"—and Lucien paused before the girl as if suddenly overcome by some emotion which for the moment mastered him,—“Annis, pardon my abrupt speech.

I know you will think it is but a book-worm's way of putting it; yet let me say it: Annis, *be my Alcestis!*"

Annis had risen while Lucien was speaking, and for a moment stood irresolute before him. Then lifting her hands with a gesture of deprecation, she said in a firm yet hurried voice, "*No, no, no!*" and brushing past the roses, fled fast along the garden path, leaving Lucien alone in the moonlight.

He sat down with somewhat of a stunned and vacant air upon the seat from which she had but just risen. Such a rebuff was not quite what he had looked for, and it took him some little time to recover his equanimity. "I was right," he said, half bitterly to himself, — "I was right in my conjecture. I had no business to bring that handsome young fellow here, with all his magnetic ways and beguiling courtesies and graces, such as women love. I was a fool to think I could hold my own against him, hedged round as I am by my

stiff formalities. Yes, I believe I am a fool. I have loved that sweet girlish thing almost ever since she has been under our roof. Her shy, dove-like ways have laid a sort of spell upon me; and yet I've contrived to conceal any special interest in her, and have disguised it all under a cousinly coolness, as if I thought it weakness to be entrapped by anything like passionate ardor. How often I have sat alone in the dark, out on the piazza, listening to her music, till it has melted all my reticent moods, and seduced me into a womanish tenderness! but I never let her know it — not I. I've doted over her sweet tones and words and her pretty helpfulness, for she has so much of that quality which the Italians call *simpatica*. And yet I have seemed as externally unconscious as if I saw none of it. Even when I have read some of her favorite poets to her, I have allowed the critic to quash the lover. That 'No, no, no!' of hers has an echo of one of her songs in

it, — the one she used to sing to that soft Spanish air. Let me see ; I think I can bring up the very words of the song :

Hark ! I hear a mocking-bird
Underneath the moonlight glow,
In the thicket, trilling low, —
Strains that hold a taunting word
As my fancy ever heard,
For they seemed to come and go :
“ Love hath never brought me woe ;
 No, no, no !
I am only mocking so ! ”

Hush ! I hear a crooning dove
Pouring out an overflow
Of delicious throb and throe,
Such as thrills the soul of Love
When it soars all doubt above ;
But it seems to warble low :
“ Not for thee this heart-burst, no !
 Ah, no, no !
I would mock to tell thee so ! ”

There is no doubt of it, I have been a fool ! And Overton — yes, into Overton’s warm-lined heart will flutter my escaped dove ! ”

VI.

“ I HAVE heard of your mother’s very serious illness, my dear fellow, but in almost the same breath I have been told of her marvellous return to life, so my sympathy must give way to congratulation. Am I selfish in asking if she is sufficiently recovered for me to venture on a week’s visit to Hazlecroft? You know I am going, with a couple of the sub-professors of our University here, on a geological exploration of our own to the Lake Superior region, and I have not the heart to leave home till I’ve followed up another research that you wot of. I think, Lucien, that you are about my best friend. Can’t you make it easy for me to come down to Hazlecroft, that I may bring the matter I have in hand to a decisive point? I must settle this question before I go, for

the oscillation of mind which it engenders unfits me for the work that I have set myself this summer."

So wrote Lucien's college chum, Richard Overton, a fortnight later, and this quick response was returned:—

"By all means come to Hazlecroft just when it suits you. My mother is entirely convalescent, and will give you cordial welcome. So, I doubt not, will my cousin Annis. If you succeed in winning an entrance into her unexplored heart, I guarantee, my good friend, you will find there a mine of richer promise than awaits you in the region of Lake Superior."

Within a few days Mr. Overton arrived at Hazlecroft,—a bright-tempered, gay-hearted young sub-professor of the University, the reverse, in all respects, in appearance, manner, and mental characteristics, of his friend Clayborne. He was a

fine talker, and full of animation, and his contagious high spirits at once imparted an unusual gayety to the old mansion.

Some three or four days after his arrival, a group of young negroes were lazily lying under a clump of trees that overhung the well.

“Wot’s de mattah wid yo’?” called out one of them, — Abednego, — as he saw Chinquapin Joe running along the path that led from the carriage-house to the quarters; “yo’ looks skeert, as ef yo’’d dun seed ole Sattin; an’ hi! how yo’ breeches be tor’d!”

“Yo’-alls be skeert too,” retorted Joe, “ef yo’ ben whar I ben.”

“Tell we-alls ’bout hit!” shouted a chorus of voices. “We dun pickin’ chips now, an’ gwine rest a while onnyhow, un’er de ole sycamore heah, tell de sprinkle be ober.”

Picking chips was an important business for the young fry. A Northern visitor, who had seen a row of barrels filled with

them in the wood-house, had suggested to Mrs. Clayborne that it would be a great saving of trouble if she would have her



CHINQUAPIN JOE.

wood sawed, and that it would be more convenient to split.

“Sawed!” she exclaimed deprecatingly, “that would never do! Where in the world would I find work for the little negroes?”

Chinquapin Joe` liked to hear himself talk, and he was soon the centre of a gaping sable audience.

“Yo’ knows dat gent’man wot comed tudder day ; Aunt Beck, she say he come co’tin’. I ax her wot co’tin’ ar’ ; she gimme cluff ’side me head, an’ tell me none o’ me b’isness ; so I boun’ I fine out. Dis ev’nin’ jes arter dinnah be ober, Miss Sibbie, she sen’ me wid two cup o’ coffee on de leetle silvah waitah, out ter de po’ch, fer Miss Annis an’ Marse Overton ; dey settin’ ’way at de eend ob de po’ch, jes whar de honeysuckles be thick. W’en I brung de cups ’way, I heerd him say, ‘Miss Annis, I wants ter see dat seat o’ yourn down by de Wood Pon’.’ She say hit gwine ter rain ; but he say, no, he ain’ t’ink so ; den dey start down de parf. I watch ’em, an’ bime-by some big draps come, an’ de kerridge-house do’ open, an’ dey runs in ; den I takes me foot in me han’, an’ slies in at tudder side, an’ creeps inter one ob de kerridge-house stalls. Yo’ knows de

hosses an' kerridge dun gone wid ole Mis' ober ter de doctah's dis mornin', so I climbs up inter de stall; yo' knows 't ain' planked up mor' 'n a foot 'bove de stall troffs, an' dat all de pa'tishun dar be 'tween de stall an' de kerridge-house flo' on dat side. I 'lows ter mese'f, — now I's gwine see wot co'tin' mean.

“Den I squat down in de troff, an' peep trew de knot-hole; but I cyarn't see dem. Den I lif' me head ober de edge ob de plank, an', sho' 'nuff, I seed 'em den settin' right b'low me on de ole cuttin'-block, an' he hab Miss Annis' han' in he own. Sho' I listen peart. An' he say, ‘Miss Annis, dis sech a leetle han'! but hit big 'nuff ter lead me!’ Den Miss Annis, she juk her han' 'way, an' I heerd him say suffin' 'bout ‘*lub, lub, lub,*’ an' she say ‘*cyarn't,*’ eber so many time. But de hens meck sech a cacklin' I cyarn't heah good. Den he say de lub come arter 'while, an' she sheck her head, an' she say, ‘no, foh she dun try.’ Den I leans ober furder ter see

whe'er she larf 'or cry, an' I be so busy 'bout hit I nebber heah de ole mar' Bounce, who 's allers squanderin' herse'f in de pash-tah lot, — I nebber heah her come inter de stall 't all ; an' she puts her nose right inter de troff, an' dar she fine me 'stid ob de fodder. De fust t'ing I knows, she jes grab me 'hine by de breeches seat, an' drap me ober de pa'tishun, right at Miss Annis' foot ! ”

“ Sarved yo' right,” roared out his auditory ; “ dat wot yo' gits foh peepin'.”

“ But Miss Annis, wot she say ? ” asked Bedego.

“ I tell yo', ef she did n't screech ! An' de gent'man, he sprung up like a pa'tridge w'en Marse Lucien gun miss him in de bresh ; an' I picks mese'f up an' gits off fas' as a squer'l w'en we shies rocks at him, an' rocks him out ob de chinquapin bush.”

“ An' ain' yo' fine out wot co'tin' ar' now ? ” questioned Mesh, sarcastically.

“ I ain' want ter know no mo' 'bout hit. Ef dat ar' co'tin', I's dun got 'nuff.”

“‘Tain’ wurff de lashin’ mammy gwine gib yo’ foh gittin’ de seat tor’d out o’ yo’ breeches, nohow,” shouted Shad; “‘tain’ wurf dat.”

“No, I ain’ t’ink hit ar’,” was Josie’s meditative reply, as he looked ruefully round at his torn tow trousers.

There was great surprise expressed at the breakfast table next morning when young Overton announced his intention of leaving Hazlecroft, where he had only been three or four days.

“Why, you promised us at least a week, Richard,” said Mrs. Clayborne, with an air of disappointment. “That is not the way to treat your friends. To let you go will make Hazlecroft lose its reputation for hospitality.”

“I had expected to remain longer,” was the somewhat embarrassed rejoinder, “but circumstances have caused a change of plan, which Lucien can explain to you, if he sees fit, after I am gone. And as Shad has had my horse at the door for the last

half-hour, I may as well make my adieux at once. Lucien, pray say good-by to Miss Annis for me ; and I beg that you will all think of me sometimes when I am away in the copper regions of the Northwest."

About a week after Richard Overton's departure, Chinquapin Joe bounced out upon the piazza, and interrupted Lucien Clayborne as he sat there with his books around him.

"Book, book !" he muttered to himself under his breath, as he approached his young master. "What a cur'us man he be ! Allers arter book, w'en he got sech a fine blood ridin' hoss in de stable as Culpepah." Then, pulling down his jacket and smoothing his white apron, he delivered his message : "Marse Lucien, ole Mis' she say she waitin' foh yo' in de chahmbah on some particklar b'isness whar she want ter speak 'bout."

The young man closed his books at once, and proceeded to his mother's chamber. She had almost entirely recovered

from the effects of her illness, had gathered up the reins of management once more, and was beginning to go her daily rounds of active supervision. Her face was growing fresh again, and the little rotund figure was filling out to its usual proportions.

“My son,” she began, as Lucien, with his deferential way, took a seat beside her, “I have reason to be profoundly thankful for the unexpected recovery which Providence has so graciously granted to me. I have been turning the matter over in my mind, and feel that a suitable acknowledgment is due for this special mercy. I had expected, in case of my death, to have my dear Mr. Holmes preach my funeral sermon, that thus the occasion might be improved for the spiritual good of our kinsfolk and our neighbors, but especially for all the servants of the plantation. I still wish to carry out my plan —”

“Dear mother,” interrupted Lucien, startled out of his usual reticence by the

odd idea, and smiling as he spoke, "not a funeral sermon to celebrate your restoration to health?"

"Certainly not a *funeral* sermon, inasmuch as I shall be there to hear it, but a sort of thanksgiving service. I shall request my dear Mr. Holmes to use the very text I had chosen for him to preach from, in case —"

"But, mother —"

"Make no objection, my dear boy; I have set my mind upon it, and I don't see any reason why the service should not be held much in the same way as it would have been had all gone otherwise. You know Annis wrote brief notes of invitation at my request, that night when you expected to close my eyes, to the various families whom I wished to be here. I want them all to reap the benefit of the lesson to be learned from the dealings of Providence with me; and so these same invitations shall stand good for next week. Let me see; there's your uncle Fontaine's family;

they can be put into the two northwest chambers. Your aunt Marshall and her girls can take the rooms opposite; my brother John and his two boys can occupy the bedroom over the big parlor; and old Uncle Charles—the little hall room can be given to him. Sister Clayborne and Nannie can go into the blue room, and your aunt Graves and her husband will fit nicely into the little downstairs chamber next my dressing-room. I have been talking with Daddy Jerry about the poultry-yard. He says the spring chickens are in fine force, and that the two calves in the cuppen are just in right condition to be killed. The sucking pigs, too, are in prime roasting order, and there are plenty of them. Gregory has been in to bring his reports about the garden; he tells me that all the early vegetables are in eating order, and that the berry crops will be on in a week or so. So all things seem to suit, and I wish you and Annis to reiterate my invitations to our kindred at once."

“But, mother dear, the entertainment of so many people will be a tax upon your strength, which is hardly up to its old point yet.”

“Not a bit of it! Miss Sibylla is energetic in her line, and is first-rate at cakes and pastry; I can trust all that to her hands. No, no; it will put life into me again to feel myself at the head of affairs and to have everything moving on in the old brisk way. I’ve had another plan in my head, which I wish you would have the patience to listen to—” But at that moment Annis entered her aunt’s chamber, and what the further plans were did not then appear.

As Uncle Dan’el had said, the mistress rarely abandoned any design after it had once taken shape in her mind. Consequently arrangements began to be set on foot at once for carrying out her scheme of turning the anticipated funeral service into a thanksgiving one. For the next week the whole plantation was stirred

with busy preparations for the entertainment of the many visitors who were expected to share its hospitality. Friends from the surrounding neighborhood were invited to be present for the special day, and Parson Holmes was requested to prepare a sermon suitable to the occasion. All the culinary skill for which old Virginia housekeepers were celebrated thirty-five years ago was brought into requisition, and pantry and larder were full to overflowing of every sort of cate and delicacy. An ancient silver service, which had once been used at Thorsway by Lord Culpepper's family (from whom Mrs. Clayborne prided herself on being descended), was brought out from the old oaken chest, where it had lain ever since the death of the master of Hazlecroft, and was made to shine with a brilliancy to which for many a year it had been a stranger. Old china was produced from buffets where it had been long locked up. Old furniture was waxed till it shone like a mirror, and the

oaken floors of parlors, chambers, halls, and stairways were polished till it became a perilous feat to walk over them.



UNCLE DAN'EL.

“I ’clar’,” cried Aunt Becky, one of the older house-maids, lifting her hands at the sight of so much preparation, — “I ’clar’ folks mought ’low dar’s gwine be a wed-

din', 'stid ob a fun'ral sarvice, in dis house !”

Matters were all in a state of readiness, and the day came for the guests to arrive. Annis had been exceedingly busy through all its hours in the great old parlor, imparting to it that air of brightness of which she held the secret. Fresh lace curtains had been hung at the windows ; the covers were taken from the old portraits. No one at Hazlecroft could remember ever having seen the yellow muslin removed from the frame above the mantel-piece that held the picture of the Baron of Thorsway, Lord Thomas Culpepper ; but Annis had leave to strip it off. The furniture was pulled about, rubbed, and arranged in more modern fashion. Every table was loaded with vases of flowers till the great room was redolent of June. The old-time sconces were brightened up and filled with real wax candles. The “Culpepper chair,” Aunt Dorothy’s peculiar treasure, because it had been brought over

from Thorsway by Lord Culpepper himself, had a fresh covering of rosebud dotted chintz draped over the ancient yellow damask, and was drawn up to one of the windows, with a stool placed before it, ready for the occupation of the mistress. The four windows of this great parlor opened to the floor upon the wide piazza which extended the whole length of the mansion.

Annis had taken her last look at the various rooms to see that all was in readiness before she went to dress for the evening. This duty was quickly done, for in half an hour she came down, attired in a simple white muslin gown, with not an ornament about her save a cluster of fresh roses on her bosom. Lucien was sitting in the library as she passed him on her way to the old drawing-room. He looked up with a bright smile, slapped the volume he had been reading together, and said to himself, "Aurora!—if she would but bring the dawn into the border of the dusk!"

But Annis did not hear him as she tripped lightly on into the apartment beyond. It looked dim and empty as the twilight began to fill its corners ; but she sought out a sofa in a remote recess, where there was a window looking toward the west, and threw herself down to rest for a few moments after the fatigues of the day. She had not lain there very long before she heard a step near her, and found Lucien was drawing a chair quietly to the side of her sofa. She sprang up to take her seat primly, as all maidens were expected to do in those old-fashioned times ; but a detaining hand was laid on her bare arm.

“ Rest yourself, Annis,” he said, “ for you will be tired enough before the late dinner is over. I have just seen my mother go off into a comfortable nap ; and now I have come to quiet you. Do you know, Annis, there seems to me something a little amusing in this ‘ funeral service,’ as the servants will persist in calling it. I

hear them bandying words constantly about it, always calling it 'Ole Mis' Fun'ral.' Even the neighbors have been making a joke of it; and it has annoyed me somewhat."

"Don't let it do that, Cousin Lucien," rejoined Annis, in her bright way, for she had a knack of always smoothing down difficulties; "everybody understands Aunt Dorothy, and it will pass off beautifully, I'm sure."

"We might make it pass off much more beautifully; you could help me do it, Annis."

"How, pray? I am ready to do anything reasonable."

Lucien looked down for a moment at the hand that he had taken within his own, and drew his finger in a sort of meditative way along the tracery of its blue veins.

"Suppose, then," he said, looking up at her inquiringly,—"suppose we adopt a German fashion for the nonce. It seems very reasonable,—to me at least. Suppose

we make it the occasion of—of our betrothal, Annis?”

Annis started up, with a quiver from head to foot, then sank back again upon the sofa and hid her face in her hands. As Lucien quietly watched her he saw a tear trickle from between the white fingers and fall upon the cluster of roses upon her bosom. Touching his lips to the roses, he began in a soft, low tone, —

“You said no to me once, Annis; and under the impression that you did so because your heart was going out toward another, I accepted your decision as best I might, and crushed back into my own heart all its love and its longings. Overton let me know that I was mistaken; and now — now have you not discovered that under the seeming snow of my too cold exterior there are volcanic fires of which you never heretofore have dreamed? Have you not come to know that I love you? May I not tell you now that the heart never before willing to own itself touched by a

woman was conquered by my little cousin before she had been two months in our midst?"

Annis neither spoke nor moved.

"I cannot be mistaken," he said passionately, drawing her hands from her face, and clasping them closely between his own. "If I am not, let me hold this hand now and — ever."

Annis's hand was not withdrawn.

A half-hour later carriage wheels were heard coming up the avenue.

"One word more," said Lucien, "before you go to meet our guests. Why did you say no to me so vehemently that evening six weeks ago under the clematis?"

There was a little embarrassed pause before Annis spoke. "Because," — and the scarlet flashed along her cheek again, — "because I believed you were merely obeying Aunt Dorothy's wish, which you thought to be a dying one."

"And what did *you* know of Aunt Dorothy's wish?"

“Ah!” — she smiled archly — “is Aunt Dorothy ever able to keep anything to herself? Besides, Aunt Anneky caught up part of the conversation between her and yourself, and you may be sure that with a servant’s love for gossip, she did not fail to repeat some of it to me the very next day. Do you wonder that under your mother’s exaction of obedience on your part, I said no? But here comes Uncle Sharon to light the candles, and I do believe I hear Uncle Fontaine’s voice; his travelling carriage is stopping at the steps.” And she broke away to receive the coming guests.



VII.

THE invited guests were all in their places in the great parlor, through whose open windows the afternoon sun came gayly streaming. The company from the neighboring plantations, together with the guests in the house, so filled the room that there was only space for the house servants to be admitted ; but the plantation hands were gathered on seats close around the windows, it being a strenuous point with their mistress that they should all be near enough to hear. Aunt Dorothy was established in the ancient "Culpepper chair," dressed in her black satin gown,

with a lace shawl thrown over her shoulders. Her quick black eyes sparkled with an unusual gladness, and her jolly little figure shook every now and then with suppressed laughter as some one of the little pickaninnies arranged near her nodded and tumbled off his stool. The "cat tail," to which Chinquapin Joe was so fond of alluding, lay at her side, ready to tickle any mischievous imp who might be found running straws into the ear of his next neighbor, or pulling from under him the stool of some little chip-picker who was sure to go to sleep during the constrained quiet.

Annis flew in and out in her bird-like way, and finally settled herself behind a curtain, where she was well hidden from view. Somehow she felt as if the service would be rather an upsetting thing. Lucien hovered about in his silent, stately way, distributing his high-bred courtesies among the many guests. A claw-footed table, as black as ebony with age, was placed for Parson Holmes, before which,

in his surplice, he took his place, and began to read the evening service with becoming solemnity.

As Aunt Dorothy had made it a point that her old head cook, Mammy Rachel, should get a little of the spiritual benefit of the occasion, she had insisted that for half an hour she should intrust the soups, roasts, and stews to "Brudder Joe," her culinary assistant. Consequently, as one of the collects was being read, Mammy Rachel, who was, as cooks are apt to be, of elephantine proportions, came puffing up the piazza steps as the crowd outside made way for her to a seat near her mistress. By the time Mammy Rachel was well settled, and had smoothed down her fresh white apron, and all the youngsters were reduced to order and quietness again, Parson Holmes was ready to begin his discourse.

"My friends," he said, gravely looking round on his audience before him, "the occasion on which we have met together

has, through God's mercy, turned out to be a thankful instead of a mournful one, as a few weeks ago was so sorrowfully anticipated. But wishing to draw instruction and warning from the memory of the solemn time upon which she still looks back, she who has been the subject of this gracious interposition desires that the same text which she had selected for her obsequies should be used in this service of thanksgiving, '*Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful.*'" He then went on to expatiate on the responsibility which necessarily devolved upon the mistress of a great household, skilfully defending the character of Martha, and showing that she was in the line of her duty, even though she was "cumbered" by it, and that perhaps she was serving the Master just as really as the introspective and meditative Mary. No doubt she too would like to have sat at her Lord's feet; but then who would have looked after the

temporal wants of the Master and His disciples? She perhaps loved her Lord no less than her unpractical and quieter sister. It was not for what she was doing that the Master reproved her in this gentle way, but for the spirit of fretfulness she manifested in the doing of it. Hers was the less pleasant duty, and it was to her credit that she was performing it so efficiently. No doubt it would have been accepted as fully as Mary's service if it had been done with as serene and heavenly a temper.

It was plain to be seen the preacher meant that Martha should stand as an impersonation of the mistress of Hazlecroft; for even Chinquapin Joe understood the allusions, and nudged Shad two or three times, with his stage-whisper, — "Dat's jes like ole Mis'!"

It is not necessary to dwell upon the suitable application given to the second portion of the text. When the closing sentence was reached, — "And now I call upon all kindred and neighbors present to

unite, at her desire, with our dear friend who sits at my right hand, in thanksgiving to Almighty power for the happy transition from sickness to health, from anxiety to gratitude, from the borders of the grave to the light and joy of a new lease of life," — the minister turned and stretched his arm toward the old "Culpepper chair;" but the chair was empty! The thanksgiving had to go on amid the half-smiling faces of the whole audience, without the one to join in it who was the occasion of it all.

Aunt Dorothy had always done the thinking for the whole establishment; and now that there were to be thirty guests to dine, and more than twice that number of her people to be feasted in the big laundry, was it any wonder this Martha was "cumbered about so much serving"? Was it surprising that the beckoning finger of Miss Sibylla, the housekeeper, should have conveyed a summons that drew her to the edge of the piazza for a brief colloquy during the pause that ensued before

Parson Holmes uttered his final sentence? As the silent prayer was being said at the close of the service, Aunt Dorothy was back again and on her knees; and when the final "Amen" was uttered, she was ready to join heartily in it, under the full persuasion that nobody had noticed her absence.

All the guests and kinsfolk came forward with kisses and congratulations; and the mistress's bright eyes brimmed over with happy tears, while her face beamed with smiles as she received them. "It was worth while to be ill," she exclaimed, with a voice broken through emotion,— "it was more than worth while to step almost upon my grave, to have my friends made so glad by my recovery!"

Not to be outdone by kinsfolk and neighbors, Uncle Sharon, the head waiter of the dining-room, felt it incumbent upon him to set the example to the house servants by some suitable congratulation. In his pompous way he advanced to the front of his

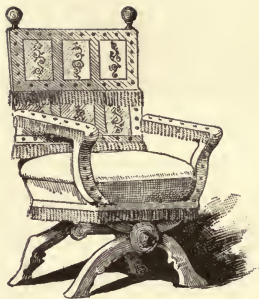
mistress's chair, after the company were through with their salutations, and bowing his grizzly head low, with a dramatic wave of the hand, he said, "De Lord be praise, whar made de Mistis fun'ral tu'n out so beautiful; de Lord be praise foh sech a libely co'pse on dis 'casion!"

Uncle Reuben, as plantation preacher, felt called upon to offer a greeting on behalf of the out-door servants. Accordingly he pushed his way through the crowd, and taking the hand of his mistress between his own hard black ones, he said in a voice tremulous with feeling, while the tears rolled down his cheeks: "T'ank God, Mistis! We 'ceives yo' back in answer ter pra'r. We 'lowed we hab mo' need foh yo' heah, ter manage dis big plantashun, dan de angels hab foh yo' up in hebben, whar dar be no managin' ter do. De good Lord, He knows dat, an' He dun t'ink so too; an' we praise Him,—dat we do!" From the crowd on the piazza, pressing about the windows, came back the

echo, "Dat we do! Dat we do! Amen! Amen!" while hands clapped, and tears glistened on many a sable face.

Chinquapin Joe was the very last to come forward; but he meant to express his thanks, for he was in a very grateful frame of mind. His mouth had been watering all through the service in anticipation of the grand feast that was to be spread for all the plantation hands in the big laundry. He knew of the roast pigs, for he had helped to catch them; he knew of the ducks and chickens, for he had helped to run them down; he knew of the gooseberry pies, for he had pricked his fingers in helping to gather the berries; and with a swelling of heart that was bound to force itself into utterance, he cried out, as he grasped the hand of his mistress, "Yes, de good Lord be t'anked ober an' ober agin! an' *please gib ole Mis' jes sech a gran' fun'ral ebbery yeah!*"

The wax lights in the sconces were well burned down before the long dinner was



THE CULPEPPER CHAIR.

over and the guests had returned to the great parlor. As those from the neighboring plantations had to go six, eight, and even ten miles to their homes (for ten miles is neighborhood in old Virginia), that portion of the company had necessarily to break up early. But before any had taken their leave, Aunt Dorothy arose from her chair, and with a little rap upon the table before her, intimated that she had a few words to say before they should go.

“I heartily thank you, my dear friends,” she began, winking back the moisture that was always so ready to film her eyes, — “I heartily thank you for your presence with me on this occasion of thanksgiving, and for all your kind congratulations and good wishes.” But to do away from your minds any lingering associations that may still link the solemn season in which the occasion originated and the present fulfilment of it, I have arranged my plans to bind it more closely with another memory, which shall hold in it nothing but joy. The

friends who are guests in my house know to what I allude. Mr. Holmes, our good rector here, will convey to my neighbors who have been with me to-day my further wishes."

Parson Holmes arose as Mrs. Clayborne took her seat, and in his formal way, and with an emphatic clearing of his throat, as if he were giving out a church notice, said, —

"I am requested by Mistress Dorothy Clayborne to extend to the kind friends and neighbors who have assisted at the thanksgiving service of to-day an invitation to be present at Hazlecroft a fortnight hence, Wednesday, 28th of June, at four o'clock P. M., on the occasion of the marriage of her ward, Annis Fontaine, to her son, Lucien Thorsway Clayborne."

THE END.

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